

Rim Fire Restoration Stanislaus National Forest

News *flash*

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OHV trail work on the Stanislaus...

Large-scale fires, like the Rim Fire, can affect recreationalists in a myriad of ways. Trail signs can be consumed by fire and overhanging, fire-burned trees can pose a safety hazard. Loosened rocks roll downslope and fallen trees can also block Off-Highway Vehicle (OHV) trails. Rocks and logs are being used to redefine trail edges to protect sensitive areas, where needed.

Post-fire trail work is occurring in addition to the OHV maintenance projects that normally occur on the Stanislaus. Route repairs such as grading and gravel application were completed on OHV Route 3N56Y in the Mi-Wok District. Tread hardening and paving work ensued on several other trails in the Hull Creek area. Conservation crews also placed barriers to block unauthorized routes. "Keeping to established trails ensures that OHV privileges are protected," said Chuck James, District Recreation Officer, Mi-Wok District. "They also help to safeguard other resources on the landscape such as meadows and critical wildlife habitat."

The end result of all of these efforts is a better ride for OHV enthusiasts. "We have replaced drainage structures along some routes," said James, "and vegetation clearance has also occurred where needed in Mi-Wok."

OHV riders comprise a large portion of the recreational use on the Forest and they normally spend a solid day enjoying their sport. "Riders should enjoy the improvements we've made," said James. "Volunteers and students from the Summer of Success Program have dedicated a lot of time to ensure our trail system is user-friendly."

Though not impacted by the Rim Fire, the Calaveras District has also been making improvements to their OHV program. "We are working on improving trail connections, protecting meadows and streams and adding staging areas within the Hemlock project," said Jeffery Hilson, OHV Specialist. "We also put a lot of effort into trail condition reports and signage."

In the Groveland Ranger District, where 55 percent of the area was impacted by the Rim Fire, OHV trails in the Ferretti and Reynolds areas are in the planning stage. "In addition to thoughtfully planning trail systems for the future," said Dusty Vaughn, Recreation Specialist, Stanislaus National Forest, "we've been focused on visitor education, labeling routes and looking for groups to partner with us on long-term planning so we can provide sustainable riding opportunities on the District."



The U.S. Forest Service has been working in partnership with the California State Parks Off Highway Motor Vehicle Recreation Division and OHV Funds at Work program to improve OHV trails on the Forest. Trail repair, restoration work and necessary law enforcement activities are positive outcomes of this working partnership. That equates to a better OHV program.

Getting the “dirt” on OHV riding

If you are new to riding OHVs on the forest, here's some tips you should be familiar with before heading into the woods. Though riding OHVs can be exhilarating, there are inherent risks involved in this sport.

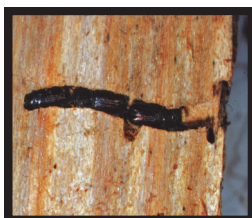
Driving conditions are complicated by rough surfaces and features. If your trail passes through a burned area such as the Rim Fire, snags can pose an additional hazard, especially if it is windy or storming. Unstable trees are notorious for falling without warning. Other safety tips include using the buddy system, wearing helmets and staying on designated routes.

Due to the remoteness of the forest, medical assistance is often a long ways away. That is something to consider since trail riding can be dangerous. Steep, mountainous terrain can block radio waves rendering cell phones useless in many locations. Add in the potential for a dose of poison oak, ticks and stinging insects and you can see that trail riding is not for everyone. OHV riding is a fun sport for those who are prepared and used to rugged outdoor conditions but please do use caution, especially within the burned area.

If you are not daunted by these conditions, OHV riding can provide you with a perfect outdoor adventure. You join the thrill of the ride with a beautiful outdoor setting. Respecting the environment as well as other recreationalists is an important aspect of trail riding within the Forest. Misusing motor vehicles can cause designated roads and trails to close temporarily or even permanently, to allow the landscape to heal.

While preparing for your first trip bear in mind that you are subject to state traffic laws including requirements for licensing, registration and vehicle operation. Laws and safety information can be obtained at <http://www.ohv.parks.ca.gov/>.

If camping near the trail appeals to your senses, the Stanislaus has a few OHV friendly campgrounds. Visit: <http://go.usa.gov/3XYRr> for details. Trail riding maps, which are an essential element of a happy and law-abiding trip can be viewed at: <http://tinyurl.com/otkej4g>. These motor vehicle use maps can be geo-referenced by using a GPS enabled device. If you need more help planning an OHV adventure, [call one of our ranger stations](#).



Hazard tree awareness

A tree is considered hazardous if it has defects that may cause a failure, resulting in property damage, personal injury or death. Structural weaknesses make trees prone to falling. In areas burned by fire, some of these weaknesses may be visible such as a severe lean or numerous conks on the trunk of the tree. Conks (shelf-like mushrooms) colonize a tree when it is dying, in order to recycle the dead wood. Here are a few more examples that will aid you in spotting potentially deadly trees:

- Loss of foliage, thinning or discolored tree crowns
- Signs of significant insect activity such as pitch tubes or frass (tiny piles of saw-dust found on tree trunks where insects have drilled into the wood)
- Sap dripping down the tree trunk; large swellings on the bole (trunk)
- Blown down trees showing root rot
- Exposed root systems, often caused by erosion or hillside undercutting
- Cracks, lightning strikes or large barkless patches of trunk
- Physical wounds such as deep charring or fire scars



Learn more about pitch tubes, frass and forest health by reading this article: <http://www.fs.usda.gov/detail/stanislaus/home/?cid=stelprd3830396>

Exploring Groveland and the story of the Rim Fire



This iconic shot of the Groveland Ranger District Office was taken by Dusty Vaughn, the District's Recreation Specialist, just prior to fleeing the Rim Fire. Photographs like this help to tell the compelling story of this wildland fire.

Soon you will be able to hear “the rest of the story” via a free audio download you can enjoy while taking a self-guided audio tour along the Highway 120 corridor and Evergreen Road. Eleven stops are featured and numbered posts will guide visitors along the route.

“Many aspects of the Rim Fire will be covered in the audio tour,” said Vaughn. “We want visitors to have a sense of what happened here along with the steps we are taking to restore the landscape on the Stanislaus.”

Taping is scheduled to start in early May. Once the final product has been released, we will post details on how to download the audio files on the Forest's Facebook page.

“This is a great way for people to learn about wildfire behavior and ecology,” said Vaughn. “Wildland firefighters, emergency response personnel and recovery team members are being interviewed to educate, engage and inspire our visitors.”

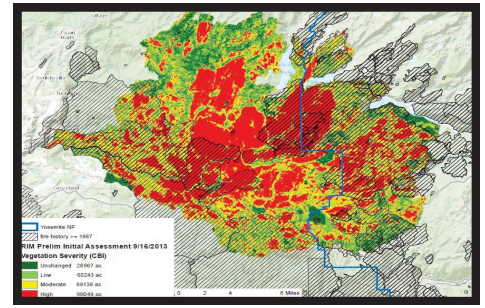
Other post-fire projects



Interpretive panels are now being created for the Rim of the World vista which overlooks the burned area. Steep terrain, flashy fuels and drought exacerbated the fire but this element is no stranger to this river canyon. Four out of nine fatalities that have occurred on the Stanislaus have happened close to this viewpoint. Pause a moment here to remember all that is at stake any time an unintended wildfire starts and firefighters are asked to respond.



School children from Tenaya and Jamestown Elementary Schools planted 300 mixed conifer trees to replace some of those consumed by the Rim Fire. Other Earth Day activities included a sing-a-long, learning about the water cycle, creating name tags from sections of tree limbs, and examining fire scars in a cross section of timber. Firefighters from the Forest assisted with the grand finale: squirting water from a hose off of Engine 42.



The story of the Rim Fire will also be visible soon via an interactive map on the web. For those who can't take the audio tour by driving around Groveland, this is the next best thing. Pictures will highlight the various stops and you will be able to read the story as you “visit” such locations as Rainbow Pool, Carlon Falls and Ferretti Road. You'll even be able to visit the Incident Command Post where you will learn how the fire organization manages large-scale wildland fires.



Wild and scenic rafting

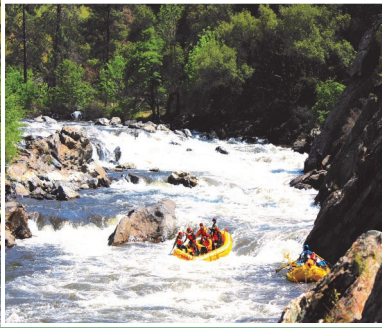


Photo Courtesy of: O.A.R.S.



Hazards had to be mitigated along the river in order for visitors to once again float the scenic Tuolumne safely.

The Tuolumne Wild and Scenic River, designated by Congress in 1984, is one of the jewels of the Stanislaus National Forest. Swift water, steep canyons and pristine views beckon rafters to enjoy an exciting float through its passageways.

Patrols along this river were conducted after the Rim Fire burned through the area. "Our goal," said Recreation Specialist, Dusty Vaughn, "was to relocate burned trees that were blocking safe routes through the rapids."

Downed trees can create dangerous log jams on a river. "In swift moving water," said Vaughn, "that can cause serious problems for the unwary. Kayaks can get bent and the force of the suction-like water behind a log jam can make escape very difficult for anyone who unwittingly gets trapped upstream of it."

Due to the success of the river patrols, all rafting permits were allowed passage this past season. To further endorse this spectacular feature, the Forest is working in conjunction with 3FIA to develop a promotional video on the recreational opportunities along the Tuolumne Wild and Scenic River. Learn more: <http://www.fs.usda.gov/activity/stanislaus/>.

Increasing Recreational Opportunities on the Stanislaus



- ◆ All areas within the footprint of the Rim Fire have reopened to visitors with the exception of Spinning Wheel.
- ◆ Seven Americorps volunteers are busy repairing trails used by visitors. They have also helped with restoration projects aimed at returning vibrancy and health to the forest.
- ◆ Seven burned bathroom facilities have been replaced in areas of high visitation.
- ◆ Boat ramps at Merrill Pool and Cherry Creek are in the process of being refurbished.
- ◆ To help replace recreational signs burned by the Rim Fire, consider joining our Sign Challenge! For details, email: gdvaughn@fs.fed.us.
- ◆ Popular day-use areas such as Rainbow Pool, Carlon Falls and God's Bath are now open.



Flowers follow fires

Wildflowers tend to follow in the path of fires, so if you are seeking a fun past-time this spring consider a wildflower tour of the Stanislaus. Though foothill blooms are fading fast due to the warm, dry weather, wildflowers should still be plentiful at higher elevations.

A drive to Groveland, Cherry Lake or along Evergreen Road will enable you to take pictures of post-fire blooms. To stretch your legs, consider a walk to Carlon Falls. This 45 minute journey (one-way) will take you through a moderately burned forest. This provides an excellent opportunity to see what plants are rebounding post-fire. Many plants native to this area will be springing forth amongst the ashes.

